## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1. A method for desensitizing a crystal having nonlinear optical properties, in particular a lithium niobate or a lithium tantalate crystal, to the damaging effects of intense exposure to light ("optical damage"), the damage being caused by light-induced variations in the refractive indices, wherein the dark conductivity of the crystal is enhanced by doping with extrinsic ions.
- 2. The method as recited in Claim 1, wherein the crystal is doped with protons which increase the protonic dark conductivity, a concentration of more than 3 x  $10^{24}$  m<sup>-3</sup>, in particular of more than 4 x  $10^{24}$  m<sup>-3</sup> being achieved.
- 3. The method as recited in Claim 1 or 2, wherein the crystal is doped with deuterons which increase the deuteronic dark conductivity, a concentration of more than  $1 \times 10^{24}$  m<sup>-3</sup> being achieved.
- 4. The method as recited in one of the preceding Claims, wherein the crystal is doped with ions which increase the electronic dark conductivity, a concentration of more than  $2 \times 10^{24}$  m<sup>-3</sup> being achieved.
- 5. The method as recited in Claim 4, wherein the ions are iron ions, whose concentration reaches more than 1 x  $10^{25}$  m<sup>-3</sup>.
- 6. The method as recited in one of the preceding Claims, wherein the ion concentration is increased by heating the crystal in an ion-rich atmosphere.

- 7. The method as recited in Claim 6, wherein the heating process is carried out under high pressure, in particular of over 100 bar.
- 8. The method as recited in one of the preceding Claims, wherein, during the doping process, an electrical field is applied to the crystal.
- 9. A crystal, which is desensitized by increasing its dark conductivity by applying the method as recited in one of the preceding claims.
- 10. An optical component having a crystal as recited in Claim9.